



## Men in Bronze: Commemorating the Revolutionary War at St. Paul's

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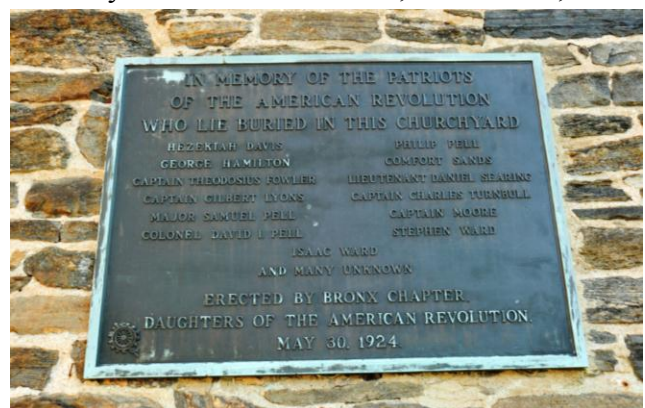
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Erected on Memorial Day 1924, a large bronze plaque on an exterior stone wall of St. Paul's Church enshrines the memory of American Revolutionary War soldiers and political leaders buried in the historic cemetery, reflecting an early 20<sup>th</sup> century approach to commemorating the generation that achieved American independence.

The tablet was commissioned by the Bronx Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (D.A.R.), the Mt. Vernon, New York branch of the organization of women who traced their ancestry to a participant in the struggles of the Revolutionary War. Founded in 1898, only a few years after Mt. Vernon's creation as a city, the chapter's chief goal was imprinting the legacy of the American Revolution on the local landscape. The unit's establishment symbolized the expansion of regional groups of an association founded on the national level in 1896. With the United States emerging as an industrial and military power, the women were seeking a glorious founding story, and their prestigious connection to it, providing a cornerstone of a rising nationalism. The Mt. Vernon chapter was named after the Bronx River, site of the proclamation of the independent state of New York on July 9, 1776.

Sponsoring educational and commemorative endeavors was an additional focus. In 1906, for instance, the Mt. Vernon chapter reported a membership of 35 women, and had funded a children's reading alcove in the recently completed public library, gifted flags to public schools and coordinated essay contests. But the members applied most of their resources to the public display of permanent, if brief history lessons. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the unit raised plaques celebrating the delaying action of American troops under Colonel John Glover of Massachusetts at the nearby Battle of Pell's Point, October 18, 1776, and marking the slaying of 17 Stockbridge Indians fighting with the Patriots in a battle fought in the Bronx in August 1778. The D.A.R. planted small marble footstones at the graves of six Revolutionary soldiers in the St. Paul's cemetery in 1910. The green, 31" x 42" tablet at the church, part of a commemoration of the sesquicentennial of the American Revolution, was among their final achievements; the unit disbanded in the 1930s.



The compilation of 13 men, all of whom lived through the war and helped develop the town in the early republic, was based on 19<sup>th</sup> century research by William S. Coffey, the church's long time rector and unofficial historian. The alphabetical register makes no distinction between men who served in the Continental army and in the militia, reflecting the D.A.R.'s approach to honoring participation in the war, which contrasts with a modern historical view drawing distinctions between the nature of service in Washington's national army and the local units. Further, it lists the community's political leader, and Town Supervisor, Stephen Ward, who had no formal military role, as well as Comfort Sands, a member of the New York Provincial Congress and the state's first Auditor General. Philip Pell, who skillfully shifted between the army and Government posts through the war and represented New York in the Continental Congress, is also imprinted in raised letters. Clearly, the D.A.R. followed a broad definition of involvement in the successful Revolution.

Expanded research over time would generate some corrections. The plaque records **Captain Moore**, who we now realize was not in the American army or navy, but rather a wealthy New York City merchant and ship owner known by the honorary title of "Captain." Neutral in the conflict between Patriots and Loyalists, Moore evacuated New York during the war. Important additions might include Samuel Ferris, who served in Drake's militia, a unit that was present at the Battle of Pell's Point, and Frederick Stevenson, who fought with Graham's militia at the Battle of White Plains, October 28, 1776. Their brief service drifted below 19<sup>th</sup> century recognition. Samuel Pease joined militia and Continental line units from New Jersey, struggled at the Battle of Monmouth in 1778, but moved to Westchester County after the war, which probably accounts for his omission.

Historically, the plaque's most salient line reads, "And Many Unknown," a reference to the church's location in the notorious 'neutral ground,' scene of many skirmishes and casualties, leading to Patriot soldiers buried anonymously in the cemetery. More particularly, the phrase suggests use of the church as an American field hospital for sick soldiers pulled out of their posts in September and October 1776, when men of different ranks from various states died at the church, followed by burial in the yard.

The most accomplished soldiers were Theodosius Fowler and Samuel T. Pell, who held officer ranks in Continental army units, served throughout the war, and tasted combat in several important engagements. Fowler, who passed in 1841, was also the last of the Patriots to die. The men were charter members of the officers' veterans' organization called the Society of the Cincinnatus, and certainly knew each other. Indeed, most of the Americans enshrined on the plaque -- several from the same families, living in a small town, drawn from similar social and economic circles -- were familiar with each other, sometimes through service in local government or on the church vestry. Collectively, they are a commendable set of Patriots, accomplishing independence, leading New York's wartime government, surviving the infamous Valley Forge winter, and achieving decisive American victories at Saratoga and Yorktown.

Designed by Eagle Bronze Works of Mt. Vernon, the simple, dignified metal tablet was anchored into the original fieldstone on the church's southwestern exterior, and unveiled on a cloudy, cool May 30, 1924. Within living memory of the Civil War, Memorial Day usually recalled the sacrifice and dedication of Northern veterans, but the tradition of honoring soldiers on that national holiday was broadly recognized. Even the few surviving local Union troops joined the large crowd to reverentially observe the St. Paul's rector Harold O. Boon poignantly accept the plaque to insure that "the names of those departed heroes, that up to today were only written on paper are now permanently recorded."

Full inscription on the tablet reads:

In Memory Of The Patriots  
Of The American Revolution  
Who Lie Buried In This Churchyard

Hezekiah Davis  
George Hamilton  
Captain Theodosius Fowler  
Captain Gilbert Lyons  
Major Samuel Pell  
Colonel David I. Pell

Philip Pell  
Comfort Sands  
Lieutenant Daniel Searing  
Captain Charles Turnbull  
Captain Moore  
Stephen Ward

Isaac Ward  
And Many Unknown

Erected By Bronx Chapter  
Daughters of the American Revolution  
May 30, 1924